

She Will Be Saved by Childbearing

A Study of 1 Timothy 2:15

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Abstract

First Timothy 2:15 has historically been a verse yielding a great deal of confusion and difficulty to understand and interpret. After surveying a diverse array of interpretations suggested by both historical and modern scholars, as well as an in-depth analysis of the lexical and contextual components of the verse, this thesis seeks to narrow down the possibilities for interpretation and offer a probable understanding of this difficult text.

First Timothy 2:15 directly follows a statement in the passage that describes the way that Eve specifically, and all women by association, was deceived and fell into sin. Within a broader context, 1 Timothy 2:15 addresses issues in a passage that also places restriction upon teaching or holding authority over men by women in the church. Despite these things, a woman will be restored to the glorious state that she was created in as she, a genuine believer, participates in the role and ministry of childbearing, as well as other godly roles that fit within God's intended order.

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She Will Be Saved by Childbearing: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:15

Introduction

First Timothy 2:15 has historically been a verse yielding a great deal of confusion and difficulty in understanding and interpreting.¹ The verse states, “Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (ESV). Throughout history, the treatment of this verse has yielded a wide array of interpretations, although most of these have appeared in some form in modern understandings. Andreas Köstenberger provides a thorough overview of the historical treatment of 1 Timothy 2:15, discussing the differing ways the verse has been interpreted by three main groups: the church fathers, the reformers, and interpreters in the modern era.² The significant members of these groups will be discussed throughout the section on the survey and critique of interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15 and what the phrase “saved by childbearing” really communicates. While there are some commentators and scholars who shy away from any definitive stance on this verse, there are a great many that do take a stance, and their interpretations will be discussed and briefly critiqued in the following section. Central to discovering the intended meaning of the verse is understanding the phrase *saved by childbearing*, from the Greek *σωθήσεται διὰ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας*, and the conditional clause that concludes the verse, *if they remain in faith and love and holiness with self-control*. Regarding the diversity of the interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15, Towner wisely acknowledges, “Clearly, none of these interpretations is

1. This thesis will assume the authority of 1 Timothy as a credible source, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as the divine Word of God through the apostle Paul.

2. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 109-121 for a detailed survey of historical viewpoints.

free of problems, and the best we can do is to narrow down the possibilities.”³ The intent of this thesis is to do just that—to narrow down the possibilities and discuss the most probable intended understanding of this difficult verse.

Survey and Critique of Interpretations

Understandably, the difficulty and confusion surrounding the interpretation of this verse has yielded a rather large variety of specific conclusions on the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:15, each of which is particularly related to the ways that the words *saved by childbearing* are translated and understood. Each of these interpretations has its own specific way of grasping these three words in their Greek forms—*σωθήσεται*, *δι*□, and *τεκνογονίας*. They can be broken down into two major classifications: physical interpretations and spiritual interpretations.

Physical Interpretations

The distinction between the physical and spiritual interpretations can heavily be attributed to each interpretation’s understanding of *σωθήσεται*, from the root word *σώζω*, which has quite a large semantic range. The physical interpretation classifications translate *σωθήσεται* in such a way to refer not to any sort of spiritual meaning, but rather to a sort of physical preservation or deliverance. There are two notable interpretations in this category, each of which interprets *σωθήσεται* in this way.

Bodily preservation. The first physical interpretation is one that understands *σωθήσεται* as referring to bodily preservation during the act of childbearing. By suggesting this, supporters of this view avoid the dilemma presented by the idea of spiritual salvation based upon an act or good work, which is probably the most difficult

3. Philip H. Towner, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-2 Timothy & Titus*, edited by Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 80.

issue that has arisen over this passage.⁴ Limiting the scope of *τεκνογονίας* to refer merely to the act of childbirth or labor, this view essentially argues that women will literally be safely brought through the process of giving birth to a child.

However, the weakness of this view greatly discredits its argument. First, the physical application necessarily assumed here in *σώζω* is very unusual in context to the word's use throughout the Pastoral Epistles. This issue will be dealt with further in the Lexical Analysis section. In addition to the weakness of the translation of *σώζω* demanded by this view, another weakness is an unusual translation of *δι* as well. By applying the use of the word to mean *during* or passing *through*, an abnormal meaning is ascribed that is not preferred. Perhaps the greatest, glaring weakness of this interpretation of physical or bodily preservation, however, is merely the fact that it simply does not prove to be true in practice. It is easily observable that many Christ-following women have died in the childbearing process, and thus this interpretation cannot stand in light of mere reality.⁵ According to Marshall, even “more decisive is the fact that a reference to safety in childbirth is entirely unmotivated by the context.”⁶ Therefore, this view can safely be rejected.

Kept safe from deception. The second physical interpretation is one that understands 1 Timothy 2:15 as an indication “that women shall be preserved (or shall

4. Supporters include C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) and John H. Bernard, *Thornapple Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1899).

5. For example, 1 Samuel 4:19-22 records the death of the daughter-in-law of Eli during her childbirth immediately after being notified that the Arc of God had been captured and that both her husband and father-in-law had died.

6. I. Howard Marshall, *International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: T&T Clark LTD, 1999), 469.

escape from) Satan (or the consequences of the curse) by adhering to their God-ordained role in the domestic sphere.”⁷ Köstenberger, the leading proponent of this interpretation, points to several other passages in which the translation of *σώζω* is difficult, in an attempt to show that its range in Paul’s letters should not be limited to spiritual salvation, but also can be used to discuss escape from danger: 1 Corinthians 3:5; 7:16; 1 Timothy 4:16; and 2 Timothy 4:18.⁸ He argues that the term is employed by Paul as a secular application to refer to a specific danger in which women are saved from; in the case of 1 Timothy 2:15, this danger is deception that comes from Satan, specifically the deception that caused Eve to fall into the transgression that is mentioned in verse 14.

Furthering his discussion of the deception, Köstenberger explains that Eve’s particular deceit occurred “because she left her proper domain under her husband’s care,” and argues that Paul here gives women a way to “avoid repeating the same mistake.”⁹ Jebb comments, “However, she may be *saved from falling into this error* of usurping authority and thus being deceived by Satan, by keeping to the proper function for which she was made. Bearing children will save her from being tempted to ‘lord it over’ the men.”¹⁰ Thus, rather than overstepping the boundaries laid out for her by God in attempting to act in ultimate authority over her husband or male authority, women ought to exercise life in their proper domain, promoting harmony in the home and the church.

7. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 121. Supporters include James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1981); S. Jebb, “Suggested Interpretation of 1 Ti 2:15,” *The Expository Times* 81, no. 7 (1970): 221-222; and Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 107-144

8. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Saved Through Childbearing? A Fresh Look at 1 Timothy 2:15 Points to Protection from Satan’s Deception,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 2 (1996): 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 6.

10. Jebb, *Suggested Interpretation*, 221.

One way in which they accomplish this is through “‘childbearing,’ that is, adhering to their God-ordained calling, including a focus on marriage, family, and the home.”¹¹ By adhering to this role, women can avoid the deception of Satan that says they ought to disregard these God-given boundaries, and therefore evade such vulnerability to Satan’s attacks. Köstenberger emphasizes “Paul’s concern for the spiritual protection of believers,”¹² seen throughout the Pastoral Epistles, and ultimately concludes that Paul is assuring women that this spiritual protection can take place if they understand and practice the importance of their role in the domestic sphere as child-bearers. Hurley takes on a similar interpretation; whereas Köstenberger emphasizes the deception of Satan directly, Hurley employs a likewise physical meaning of *σωθήσεται* to suggest that Paul is stating that women will be kept safe from the error of seizing the role to which men alone are called (teaching and exercising authority over men), as Paul has made clear in verse 12 of the same passage.

Most proponents of this view see *τεκνογονίας* as a synecdoche that goes beyond solely the act of childbearing and refers to the whole scope of women’s roles in the domestic sphere. Although Köstenberger is hesitant to make a definitive conclusion on this note, he does admit that “the interpretation of ‘childbearing’ in terms of a synecdoche appears well-founded in the light of the close parallel passage in 1 Tim 5:14 where the ‘bearing of children’ (*τεκνογονεῖν*) is part of a series of verbs including ‘to marry’

11. Köstenberger, *Fresh Look*, 6.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

(γαμε□ν) and ‘managing their household’ (οἰκοδεσποτε□ν).”¹³ By adhering to these roles, Köstenberger says, women will avoid the deception and temptation of Satan.

One weakness of this view is, of course, that Satan is not explicitly mentioned in the passage. Köstenberger argues that it is implied by the context and that the parallel passage of 1 Timothy 5:14’s mention of Satan is more than enough evidence to allow this assumption. Perhaps a more important issue, however, is the fact that a simple reading of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 does not, by any means, put the most emphasis on the deception of Eve and her need to escape from it. Rather, the emphasis appears to be on the divine order set forth by God for a man and woman in the context of the home and the church, particularly in the worship assembly. Submissiveness is a major theme in the passage, and it is evident that discerning roles is central to the meaning of the passage. It seems rather random that Paul would make a switch at the end of the passage to insert a significant discussion on the woman’s deception by Satan before then turning back to childbearing as an important role of women as a way in which to prevent this deception. Instead, the passage seems to argue for the proper order that God intends His people to live by, and that the deception mentioned in verse 14 is more so an explanation, or argument in favor of, this proper order than anything else. Fee comments with regard to the error of Eve in her deception, “. . . it is nearly inconceivable that Paul would use the verb **saved** in an absolute way, as he does here, without some qualifier (e.g., ‘from these errors’), if he had intended to refer to verses 11-12.”¹⁴

13. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 120.

14. Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), 75.

Furthermore, it still stands that the way in which supporters of this “kept safe from deception” interpretation translate *σωθήσεται* is unnatural. The use of this word to refer to any sort of physical preservation is highly unlikely. Köstenberger strongly discourages another view by the fact that its foundational argument of translation is “not corroborated, to say the least”¹⁵ by evidence in the context. Likewise, however, his own interpretation of this passage with reference to safety or preservation from the deception of Satan simply is not supported by the context. Indeed, “despite the plausibility of the motif of deliverance from Satan in the context of the PE as a whole . . . , there is no explicit mention of Satan in this passage and the context favours a reference to salvation in the broader sense.”¹⁶ This view draws in a concept that cannot be validated by the very words and emphasized ideas present in the passage. It simply reads too much into the text that is not there. There are several other interpretations which make much more sense of the text, as will be showed below.

Spiritual Interpretations

Arguably, the spiritual interpretations offer a far better understanding of 1 Timothy 2:15 primarily because, compared to Paul’s use of the word in his writings throughout the New Testament and in the Pastoral Epistles especially, attributing *σώζω* a purely physical meaning is highly unnatural. The majority of the views held by scholars fall into this category, and seven of those will be discussed here.

Messianic. The first popular school of thought under the interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15 attributing *σωθήσεται* a spiritual understanding is the Messianic, or Christological, interpretation. Supporters of this view essentially argue that this verse

15. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 120.

16. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 470. “Pastoral Epistles” referred to as “PE.”

alludes to Genesis 3:15 and emphasizes the importance of the birth of Christ, translating the verse to literally read “She will be saved through *the* childbearing,” as in the birth of the divine child, Christ Jesus.¹⁷ Thus, women will be spiritually, eternally saved “by the great child-bearing, by that which has produced the Savior, the child-bearing of Mary, which has undone the work of Eve.”¹⁸ Here, emphasis is placed upon this one particular instance—the birth of Christ—which has become the means of salvation not only to women, but to the world.

While this interpretation does do a good job in avoiding any complications with the connection between spiritual salvation and the act of childbearing, its argument is not strong. Not only does it narrow down *τεκνογονία* to one particular instance, which is an improper understanding of the word, but it also promotes a much more significant idea than seems to be actually present in the text.¹⁹ Köstenberger argues against the Messianic view:

While verse fifteen may allude to Gen 3:16, there is absolutely no hint in the text that the author of the Pastorals intends to refer to a Messianic rendering of Gen 3:15, the so-called “proto-evangelion.” It must also be noted that the presupposed understanding of Gen 3:15 as the “proto-evangelion” is found only in the second century and nowhere occurs in the NT.²⁰

17. Supporters include Roger A. Bullard, “Feminine and Feminist Touches in the Centenary New Testament,” *Bible Translator* 38, no. 1 (1987), 118-122; Charles J. Ellicot, *A New Testament Commentary for English Writers, Vol. 3* (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1897); Rev. Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb Limited, 1973). Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); and Church Fathers Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 and Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 17.

18. Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 33.

19. Köstenberger (*Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 118) notes that the phrasing of the childbearing mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:15 indicates that, instead of referencing *one* specific birth, it references the broader concept of childbearing in general.

20. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 118.

Köstenberger also points out the randomness of the appearance of such a historic typology to appear in this passage.²¹ To argue such emphasis upon the birth of Christ by Mary in this text is a far stretch. Indeed, Guthrie formulates:

For if that were the writer's intention he could hardly have chosen a more obscure or ambiguous way of saying it. That Paul would have left the words 'the child-bearing' without further definition is highly improbable. The Greek article is generic, describing the whole process of child-bearing, rather than definitive of one particular instance.²²

The messianic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 may sound plausible at first, but it is not a very natural understanding of the text and does not stand firm against scrutiny.

Hindrance. The second interpretation classified under a spiritual connotation is what will here be termed the hindrance interpretation, sometimes referred to as the "concessional" view. Supporters of this view make their argument largely based upon their translation of $\delta\iota\sigma\kappa\epsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon$, suggesting that the word connects a woman's salvation to her overcoming of her hindrance (a result of her sin as mentioned in the preceding verse), while identifying this hindrance as the childbearing itself.²³ One of the major supporting factors of this interpretation is its connection to Genesis 3:16, which describes the pain that women will suffer in pregnancy as a result of their sin. By making this link to Genesis from 1 Timothy 2, the hindrance interpretation takes the verse as meaning that women will be saved *despite* having to suffer through the pain of childbearing. The curse of woman for her sin is found in her pain in childbearing. Even though women must

21. Ibid., 118.

22. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 78.

23. Supporters include Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. 3: Galatians-Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958); John Calvin, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus*, edited by Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998); Simon Coupland, "Salvation Through Childbearing? The Riddle of 1 Timothy 2:15," *The Expository Times* 112, no. 9 (2001), 302-303; and E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1957).

endure and pass through this difficult circumstance, they will still be able to be saved (spiritually) in Christ.

To draw a parallel to 1 Timothy 2:15, supporters of this view commonly cite 1 Corinthians 3:15, “but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (NASB). Alford comments,

Just as that man should be saved through, as passing through, fire which is his trial, his hindrance in his way, in spite of which he escapes,—so she shall be saved, through, as passing through, her child-bearing, which is her trial, her curse, her (not means of salvation, but) hindrance in the way of it.²⁴

According to the hindrance view, Paul’s intention here is to comfort or console women for their existence in this condition; he is aiming to remind them of the security of their hope of salvation despite the punishment that they must suffer now.²⁵

While this interpretation certainly does a good job of explaining how spiritual salvation may be connected to a woman’s “good works” of childbearing, thus keeping consistence with Paul’s teaching on faith-alone salvation, other scholars discredit it for its stretching interpretation of $\delta\iota$. In fact, many go so far as to say that the semantic range of $\delta\iota$ is rather abused by this translation.²⁶ Furthermore, this type of interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 does not seem to be especially relevant to Paul’s discussion in 1 Timothy 2. The passage exists to discuss the proper order of worship in the church, including the roles of both men and women in this setting; the topic of childbearing as a hindrance to a woman that will not restrict or prohibit her salvation simply does not fit. Therefore, this interpretation should not be accepted as a valid solution.

24. Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 320.

25. Calvin, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 49.

26. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.” *An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue With Scholarship*, edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger, 85-120 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 117.

Attendant circumstances. The next interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 which translates *σωθήσεται* as having a spiritual connotation is what is commonly referred to as the “attendant circumstances” view. Supporters of this view place emphasis on childbearing as an extremely important, meaningful, and “almost sacramental”²⁷ role of women, and translate *δι* to mean “in the experience of.”²⁸ Thus, Paul “deprecates the effort on the part of some women to find their calling in public teaching, since motherhood is the fulfillment of their highest function and retrieves a blessing out of the primitive curse.”²⁹ White comments on this note:

So St. Paul, taking the common-sense view that childbearing, rather than public teaching or the direction of affairs, is woman’s primary function, duty, privilege and dignity, reminds Timothy and his readers that there was another aspect of the story in Genesis besides that of woman’s taking the initiative in transgression: the pains of childbirth were her sentence, yet in undergoing these she finds her salvation. *She shall be saved in her childbearing* That is her normal and natural duty; and in the discharge of our normal and natural duties we all, men and women alike, as far as our individual efforts can contribute to it, “work out our own salvation.”³⁰

The attendant circumstances view ultimately concludes that, because of a woman’s being saved (spiritually), she is to do her part by bearing children, and even further, by faithfully involving herself in the growth of her family and marriage also. Falconer makes an important distinction by pointing to the conditional clause that concludes the verse as

27. Robert A. Falconer, “1 Timothy 2:14-15: Interpretative Notes,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 60, no. 4 (1941), 376.

28. Supporters include Falconer (*Interpretative Notes*, 375-379) and Newport J. D. White, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965).

29. Falconer, *Interpretative Notes*, 376.

30. White, *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 110.

an identification and clarifier that the women being discussed are already Christians.³¹ By doing so, he is able to address and explain the confusion presented by this clause, which will be discussed later in the Lexical Analysis section.

The greatest obstacle presented by this interpretation is the unusual translation of $\delta\iota\ \square$ to mean *in the experience of*. Many scholars do reject this view for that reason, but it is important to note that this can be a valid translation. In fact, Danker lists 1 Timothy 2:15 as one of several other uses of $\delta\iota\ \square$ in the New Testament that should rightly be translated and understood as “of attendant or prevailing circumstances.”³² While this may not be the most common translation, it is certainly plausible. The only other issue to be mentioned is the ultimate conclusion that if, in fact, this is the correct understanding of the verse, it does not entirely remove the problem of childbearing being of particular importance and means to a woman’s salvation, potentially contradicting Paul’s other emphases on faith alone. This problem arises in many of the mainstream interpretations of the verse, and it seems very difficult to avoid it altogether, as will be observed throughout the remainder of this section. There are factors that play into this issue that can help one to understand the apparent contradiction, most notably the understanding of just what Paul meant by using the word $\sigmaωθήσεται$. This, too, will be examined further.

Eschatological. Probably the most popular interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 in the modern day is the eschatological view (also known as the perseverance view), which

31. Falconer, *Interpretative Notes*, 377.

32. Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition: Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, revised, 2000), 225. Hereafter referred to as “BDAG.”

emphasizes the importance of a woman's role in the domestic sphere and her adherence to it as a support to what she will find to be her final, ultimate (eschatological) salvation.³³ Supporters of the eschatological view understand the verse to mean, essentially, “‘She will be (finally) saved by fulfilling her domestic role (the bearing and nurture of children)’ The added condition requires also the practice of true Christianity as described with the following virtues.”³⁴ Thus, the verse is viewed as a discussion of the specific circumstances in which women ought to function as believers. Paul is highlighting a very important role that women have been given, that is, to be faithful wives and mothers. As Marshall advises, “More likely what Paul intends is that woman's salvation, from the transgressions brought about by similar deception and ultimately for eternal life, is to be found in her being a model, godly woman, known for her good works (v. 10; cf. 5:11).”³⁵

Most scholars who hold this viewpoint also see Paul's mention of *τεκνογονίας* as a synecdoche referring not only to the bearing of children, but to the rearing of them also.³⁶ One strength in this understanding is that it is able to extend the meaning of the verse to being applicable to more than just mothers. Because not all women bear children, it seems that this is a fitting interpretation. It is generally agreed among many scholars and commentators beyond the eschatological view itself that the emphasis on *τεκνογονίας*

33. Supporters include Ann L. Bowman, “Women in Ministry: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 594 (1992), 193-213; Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*; Douglas J. Moo, “1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,” *Trinity Journal* 1, no. 1 (1980), 62-83; Stanley E. Porter, “What Does it Mean to be ‘Saved by Childbirth’ (1 Timothy 2.15),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993), 87-102; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *Critical Eerdman's Commentary: The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000); Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*; and Schreiner, *An Interpretation*.

34. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 470.

35. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 75.

36. One notable difference here is Porter (*What Does it Mean?*, 87-102).

and the roles of women discussed elsewhere in 1 Timothy imply a wider range of understanding of the word.

Another strength of this interpretation is the way that it links together childbearing with the good works Paul calls women to earlier in the passage. By pointing back to verse 10 and its stressing of the importance of good works to come from a woman who professes godliness, supporters of the eschatological view are able to say that the activities involved in childbearing and rearing are several ways in which women may involve themselves in doing those good works.

A problem with this view, as Köstenberger points out, is that “the eschatological interpretation of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ with reference to the second coming of Christ . . . is not corroborated, to say the least, by any further eschatological references in the context.”³⁷ Instead of such emphasis on the future aspects of the word, he explains that $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ should be translated with a more comprehensive understanding. Köstenberger also argues that this interpretation, too, “does not entirely remove the dilemma of finding Paul here speaking of salvation by works. Merely shifting the temporal point of references from past or present to future does not completely solve the difficulty.”³⁸ Aside from these two issues, though, Köstenberger concludes that unless a more satisfying understanding arises, “this is a reading of the text that is certainly possible and perhaps correct.”³⁹

Evidence. Somewhat similar to the eschatological interpretation (and its emphasis on good works) is the evidence view, which essentially understands that, by this verse,

37. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 120.

38. Köstenberger, *Fresh Look*, 2.

39. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 121.

“Paul was teaching that women prove the reality of their salvation when they become model wives and mothers whose good deeds include marriage and raising children.”⁴⁰

Obviously, supporters of this interpretation also understand *τεκνογονίας* as a synecdoche extending to child rearing also. Once again the common criticism arises regarding the strength of the connection here advocated between salvation and good works. Schreiner responds to such criticism by stating,

A contradiction with Pauline theology would only exist if the text were claiming that one must do these good works in order to *earn or merit* salvation, or that works are the grounds of one’s salvation. Elsewhere Paul insists that good works are a necessary consequence of salvation. Paul is not asserting in 1 Timothy 2:15 that women *merit* salvation by bearing children and doing good works... Since Paul often argues elsewhere that salvation is not gained on the basis of our works , I think it is fair to understand the virtues described here as evidence that the salvation already received is genuine. Any good works of a Christian, of course, are not the ultimate basis for salvation, for the ultimate basis for salvation is the righteousness of Christ granted to us.⁴¹

To illustrate this point, Schreiner also points to the same “problem” arising in 1 Timothy 4:11-16 to show that good works and perseverance are elsewhere stressed in the New Testament as important factors in one’s realization of their already-attained salvation.⁴² Childbearing is, of course, not the only evidence of a woman’s faith and striving to live a godly lifestyle, which is why it should be included in the “good works” that she ought to participate in. “These good works are necessary to obtain eschatological salvation”⁴³ not

40. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Vol. 34* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 102. Supporters of this view include Lea and Griffin; John A. Jelinek, “Annotations on the Text and Message of 1 Timothy 2:1-15,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 2, no. 2 (1998), 176-188; and Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 85-120.

41. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 119.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, 120.

because they are the means by which salvation is earned, but because they ought to appear in the life of one who is truly saved.

It seems strange, however, that Paul would literally write the words “she will be saved by childbearing” if the intended understanding was “she will prove her salvation by childbearing.” This interpretation of the text does not stand up to scrutiny simply because of the very words presented in 1 Timothy 2:15. While childbearing and good works may indeed be presented as evidence of salvation, concluding that Paul’s purpose in this passage was to demonstrate that women ought to actively prove their salvation by them pushes the interpretation too far.

Metaphor for good works. A view popular among the church fathers, though not so much in the present day, is the interpretation that sees 1 Timothy 2:15’s use of *τεκνογονία* as merely a metaphor for good works.⁴⁴ Egalitarian scholar Kenneth Waters sees the entire passage of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as a metaphor not to be taken literally and comments,

My pivotal point is that the term “childbearing” is also an allegorical metaphor just like all other terms in this passage. The children to be borne are not actual human children, but rather metaphorical children. These children are four in number. Their names are faith, love, holiness, and temperance, the very virtues mentioned in the immediate context of the term “childbearing.”⁴⁵

A strength of this view is that, by metaphorically linking childbearing to good works, supporters have the freedom to conclude that Paul’s words to women apply not only to those who have physical children of their own, but rather to all women who are saved.

44. Supporters include Kenneth L. Waters, “Revisiting Virtues as Children: 1 Timothy 2:15 as Centerpiece for an Egalitarian Soteriology,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2007), 37-49 and Church Fathers Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12 and Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate* 4.

45. Waters, *Virtues as Children*, 38.

One major problem for this view, however, is obviously the issue of salvation by works, which contradicts all of Paul's other writing on the subject. Also, as Moo points out, this sort of interpretation assigns a very unusual and invalid meaning to *τεκνογονία*.⁴⁶ It is certainly understandable that this view is no longer a prominent one, for it is an extremely stretching understanding and should not be seen as legitimate. As Köstenberger insists, "While the importance of women's good works is stressed in the NT and Pauline teaching, this approach resorts to a symbolic interpretation that appears inconsistent with the epistolary genre and the passage's context."⁴⁷ Passages strong in metaphoric meaning have practical application and purpose; there is no reason that this passage should be seen as merely allegorical, referring only to good works.

Faithful children. In this view, Paul's reference to being saved by childbearing speaks to the reward that women will receive as a result of the faithful upbringing of their children to follow Christ.⁴⁸ A strength of this interpretation is that supporters of this view are able to take the seemingly awkward "she...they" construction of the verse in a way that does not appear awkward at all; rather, the "they" at the end of the verse ("if they continue...") refers to a woman's children. Therefore, women will be saved by childbearing if *their children* continue in faith, love, and holiness.

However, while this view does seem to resolve the "she . . . they" awkwardness, the problems presented by this view are extremely significant. That is, this view advocates that the salvation of a woman is contingent upon the perseverance of her

46. Moo, *Meaning and Significance*, 71.

47. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles*, 117.

48. Supporters include Church Fathers Chrysostom, *Homilies on Timothy IX* and Jerome, *Letter 107* 6.

children in Christian faith. The New Testament certainly does not support a works-based salvation, and it would be even worse than that to advise women, that the means of salvation lies in that of her children. Because of these great weaknesses, not many hold this view today, and most scholars dismiss it quickly.

Other Interpretations

There also exists a small collection of secondary interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15, which shall briefly be mentioned here.

Dismissive. In his article, “What Does it Mean to Be ‘Saved by Childbirth?’” Stanley Porter observes three minority views that seek to explain away the difficulties in translating 1 Timothy 2:15 by dismissing the text as valid for one of a few possible reasons. The first is essentially to deny authentic Pauline authorship, although, as Porter demonstrates, “this view is ultimately less than satisfactory.”⁴⁹ When compared with the historic evidence of the authentic Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy, it does not stand.⁵⁰

A second dismissive interpretation is to assert that 1 Timothy 2:11-14 was intended as a quote of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which likewise discusses silence and submission of women in the church. However, the significant issues are that, first, this explanation does not really suggest anything meaningful against the validity of Paul’s statement anyway, and second, this explanation does not even address verse 15.

A third dismissive view is to speculate that this passage was a later addition to the remainder of the letter. The glaring problem with all of these variations of dismissive

49. Porter, *What Does it Mean?*, 89.

50. The purpose of this paper does not include making arguments for authorship, but instead seeks to *interpret* Scripture as it is recorded. For more information regarding authorship, Porter (*What Does it Mean?*, 87-90) gives a brief overview of the dismissive views, offering arguments against each that affirm the authentic Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy. See also Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy*, 23.

interpretations is simply that holding any of them is a denial of the Pauline authorship of the verse. For the purposes of this research, authentic Pauline authorship and the inspiration and authority of Scripture are assumed.⁵¹

Refutation. This view of 1 Timothy 2:15 is not necessarily a secondary interpretation; rather, it is intermingled throughout many of the more central interpretations of the verse and is typically mentioned as a contributing factor to the argument of many interpreters. Many emphasize this factor, while some only briefly mention it, and still others do not place significance on it at all.⁵² As it stands, an argument including the emphasis on Paul's response or refutation of opposing teachings does enhance one's understanding of the verse. It is, in fact, very probable that within Paul's words to 1 Timothy was included a response to false teaching that was occurring in the church. False teaching is even a topic specifically addressed in the letter. Historical evidence shows that there may have been a teaching being presented in Ephesus that marrying and bearing children was condemnable.⁵³ If this was the case, Paul may very well have aimed to address and contrast this falsity, affirming the value and divine purpose for marriage and childbearing. The problem that comes along with this interpretation, however, is the point at which the response to false teaching becomes more significant than understanding the actual meaning of the passage and its application.

51. Additionally, authentic Pauline authorship will also be assumed for all of the Pastoral Epistles.

52. A few commentators who emphasize Paul's refutation of opposing teachings include David R. Kimberley, "1 Tim 2:15: A Possible Understanding of a Difficult Text," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 35, no. 4 (1992), 481-486; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*; David M. Scholer, "Women, Authority & the Bible," *1 Timothy 2:9-15 & the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry*, edited by Alvera Mickelson, 193-219 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986); and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.12.89-90.

53. Kimberley, *A Possible Understanding*, 484-486.

Kimberley advocates this refutation interpretation, denying other options and limiting the scope of understanding to the idea that the passage exists purely as Paul's response to false ideas that had pervaded the church, specifically that of Gnostic heresy. While a variation of this view may certainly aid in understanding and interpreting 1 Timothy 2:15, it would be a mistake to take the passage as merely a response to opposing teaching with no further meaning or application. Indeed, as Schreiner affirms, "Even if 1 Timothy were written entirely to address specific circumstances (which is doubtful), it would not logically follow from the occasional nature of the letter that 1 Timothy has no application to the church today. It would be a grave mistake to argue [this]."⁵⁴

Egalitarian. One final view that deserves notice is that of the egalitarian viewpoint. Egalitarian supporters commonly understand 1 Timothy 2:15 as Paul's way of saying that "women would be saved from their churchly prohibitions."⁵⁵ In this view, womanhood, as a whole, is avenged from her transgression through childbearing, and each individual woman, by continuance in faith, love, and holiness, has the ability to be "saved from her condition which prohibits her teaching."⁵⁶ Many egalitarians point to alleged cultural issues in Ephesus at the time to explain verse 15 as a way to cancel out Paul's prohibition of women teaching in verse twelve. In the words of Ronald Pierce, women are given the opportunity to overcome "the curse of male dominance."⁵⁷ With

54. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 87.

55. Mark D. Roberts, "Women Shall be Saved: A Closer Look at 1 Timothy 2:15," *Reformed Journal* 33, no. 4 (1983), 22. Egalitarian perspectives include Roberts; Ronald W. Pierce, "Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Tim 2:8-15: A Test Case," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 3 (1993), 344-355; and Craig S. Keener, "Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:8-15," *Priscilla Papers* 12, no. 3 (1998), 11-13.

56. Roberts, *Women Shall be Saved*, 21.

57. Pierce, *Evangelicals and Gender Roles*, 353.

regard to the prohibition of women to teach and have authority over men, egalitarians typically use a cultural argument similar to the refutation interpretation, saying that the prohibition addressed a specific situation only, which probably was related to a false teaching in the church at that time. Schreiner asks an important question on this note:

We must probe to see whether Paul's admonitions to women in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 are temporary directives in response to the impact of the false teachers. Can we show that Paul prohibited women from teaching men solely on the grounds of the false teaching afflicting the Ephesian church?⁵⁸

Moo further affirms, "There is absolutely nothing in the passage which would suggest that Paul issued his instructions because of a local situation of societal pressure."⁵⁹

Aside from several other problems that egalitarians bring to the table when discussing this passage of Scripture in particular, the insistence that 1 Timothy 2:15 is offering salvation from the condition in which men domineer over women, there is one issue that has already been briefly mentioned that makes this interpretation safely renounceable. Roberts, in a discussion on the use of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ in the New Testament, reports that the range of the word includes numerous non-theological implications. While indeed it does, as has been briefly mentioned and will be discussed in depth in the Lexical Analysis section, the use of the word in the Pastoral Epistles in particular always has a spiritual meaning, unless its use in 1 Timothy 2:15 is the sole exception. Egalitarians who interpret the passage as argued above translate the word with a non-spiritual approach, and this should not be accepted as legitimate.

58. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 88.

59. Moo, *Meaning and Significance*, 82.

Contexts

At this point in the study of 1 Timothy 2:15, it will be very helpful to take a deeper look into the various contextual components of the verse. There are three major categories of context that are especially applicable for this study: historical, theological, and literary.

Historical

The first group of contextual details to incorporate into one's understanding of this difficult verse (and passage) is the historical background of 1 Timothy. What is now a book (epistle) in the New Testament canon was originally written as a letter from the apostle Paul to Timothy, a leader in the church in Ephesus. Of particular importance is to understand the purpose of which Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. Conveniently, Paul addresses this in the letter itself. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul states, "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (ESV). One of the main purposes Paul had in writing this letter, therefore, was to address how people ought to conduct themselves in the church. A more specific focus may be to remind the members of the church in Ephesus not to depart from the true teaching of God, and to clarify correct doctrines so that the members could devote itself to serving God as they ought (1 Timothy 1:3-5).

A heavy emphasis has been placed by many commentators on this purpose of correcting false teaching, which is clearly an issue that Paul addresses in the letter. However, while giving attention to the larger historical context is absolutely necessary, the extent to which the "confronting errors" is emphasized in 1 Timothy must be handled

carefully and not allowed to dictate the entire interpretation and application of the letter, as the specific historical issues (whether they may be heretical teachings, doctrinal immaturity, or problems with authority) facing the Ephesian church are not discussed at length.⁶⁰ That is to say, the letter has more to it than simply refuting heretics. Schreiner maintains,

After Paul had functioned as a missionary and church planter for so many years, he likely had at least a general vision of how churches should be structured. Hence, his instructions were not entirely situational but reflect the pattern of governance that he expected to exist in his churches Universal principles are tucked into books written to respond to specific circumstances.⁶¹

As it stands, there were obviously some doctrinal beliefs and practices that Paul aimed to address in his letter of 1 Timothy. Therefore, the letter's purpose was to refute and prevent further false teaching, to teach correct doctrine and practice, and to promote the godly lifestyles of believers.⁶²

With particular regard to the "childbearing" reference Paul makes in 1 Timothy 2:15, it is helpful to understand the cultural view on motherhood in the historic audience to which this letter was written. Van der Jagt discusses this and points out, "The audience of the author did **not** see childbearing as a possible means of salvation. In the Jewish and Hellenistic world childbirth was associated with negative elements" (emphasis original).⁶³ In particular, Van der Jagt focuses on impurity as a major issue accompanying

60. Douglas J. Moo, "What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11-15," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 176-188 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 183. See also Bowman, *Exegetical Study*, 194.

61. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 87.

62. Bowman, *Exegetical Study*, 195.

63. Krijn Van der Jagt, "Women are Saved Through Bearing Children (1 Timothy 2.11-15)," *Practical Papers for the Bible Translator* 39, no. 2 (1988), 207.

the view of bearing children in that time and culture. To a modern audience, he points out,

It seems to reduce the woman to a biological production unit. However, the audience to whom the author addressed himself must have also heard a revolutionary message in the same words. The text of 1 Tim 2.15 contains a rehabilitation of the woman, of womanhood, and of motherhood.⁶⁴

There is something very significant that the historical, original readers saw in this commendation of childbearing. Paul sought to promote a refreshed, counter-culturally positive view of this high calling of women.

Theological

Three theological themes in 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles that deserve attention in this study are salvation, faith, and good works, all of which are referenced in 1 Timothy 2:15. Each of these concepts has relationships with the others, and is significant to the interpretation and understanding of 1 Timothy 2:15.

Salvation. One of the first things that comes to mind when one reads “She will be saved by childbearing,” is immediately to ask “What does this imply about the means of a woman’s salvation?” There are several other references within the Pastoral Epistles that help to affirm that in no way is the means of a woman’s eternal salvation dependent upon childbearing (or any works at all). For example, both 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 3:5 explicitly reveal that salvation has come to believers by God’s own grace and mercy, not by righteous works. Salvation is a concept fully rooted in grace through faith throughout the entire New Testament. At the same time, however, there is still human responsibility seen throughout as well. Sanctification and the bearing of good works are consequences of true salvation, without a doubt. Based on these things, it is vital to understand that 1

64. Ibid., 207.

Timothy 2:15 cannot, by any means, be teaching eternal salvation on the basis of childbearing. That would be absolutely irreconcilable with the whole of Scripture.

However, this does not mean that childbearing (or other good works) have no relation to salvation, either.

Faith and good works. With regard to 1 Timothy 2:15, Simon Coupland writes, “The theological problem posed by the verse is obvious. How could the author . . . suggest that salvation could come not through faith in Christ alone, but through the ‘work’ of childbearing?”⁶⁵ Paul himself, in the very same chapter, shows that this is not his intention. Rather, he confirms that Jesus is the one mediator between God and men who gave his life to reconcile man to God, and that for the very reason of telling Gentiles about faith in Him is why Paul was appointed to be a preacher and an apostle (1 Timothy 2:5-7). All throughout the New Testament salvation is stressed as a result of faith. Good works, however, are stressed as a result of salvation. Good works are seen in the New Testament, and Pastoral Epistles specifically, not as the basis of meriting salvation, but rather as consequences of it. Good works accompany true saving faith. In fact, James goes so far as to say that good works are what justify a person’s faith as true (James 2:14-26). There is unavoidably a major emphasis even in 1 Timothy on good works as extremely important in a believer’s life (1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10; 6:18). Believers alive in the present time exist in the period between already being saved and yet not having experienced a completed salvation. In the meantime, good works should be produced. The faith-based salvation that believers embrace is precisely what makes the production of these good works possible by the power of the Holy Spirit as they grow closer to the

65. Coupland, *Salvation Through Childbearing?*, 302.

glorification that awaits them.

Textual

In 1 Timothy 2, specifically, it appears that Paul aimed to address and correct some disputes that had appeared in the worship assemblies in Ephesus. The chapter discusses proper methods of praying for others, reverent conduct in worship, appropriate adornment (for women in particular) with good works rather than extravagant outward appearance, and equitable attitudes of quietness and submission (for women in particular) in the assembly.⁶⁶ It is within this context—the appropriate behavior of women in the public church assembly—that Paul writes “she will be saved through childbearing.” It seems that the layout of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 could go something like this: First, in vv. 9-10, Paul expresses that women should adorn themselves with good works. Second, and starting in v. 11, Paul “warns them about certain activities that do not fall into this category.”⁶⁷ Finally, in v. 15, Paul picks out one highly important activity of women to highlight—one that does fall into this category: childbearing.

Paul is not attempting to limit women’s roles down to childbearing alone, however. In fact, “the Pastoral Epistles and the entire New Testament envision a broad role for women in ministry.”⁶⁸ Lea continues, citing several passages that display a woman’s acting in ministry roles: women prophesied, served, were fellow workers with (and were commended by) Paul, were helpers to many, and even taught others.⁶⁹ Despite the fact that women are limited in the scope ministry roles (1 Timothy 2:12), they still are

66. Bowman, *Exegetical Study*, 213.

67. Moo, *What Does it Mean?*, 179.

68. Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 104.

69. *Ibid.*

to engage in a wide variety of ministries, as affirmed by Paul himself. The difference is not capability, but rather is simply in keeping with the order that God designed for His people to function under in the church. This idea is what 1 Timothy 2 exists to discuss.

Lexical Analysis

It is plainly seen that the options that have arisen for the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 are quite diverse. This verse, being so difficult to understand at face value, may seem to become even more complex when considering the overwhelming number of options for its interpretation. However, despite the complexity that comes with this verse and the implications of each interpretation, there is a key method that is central to understanding its meaning. By examining the incredibly important words *σωθήσεται*, *δι*, and *τεκνογονίας*, as well as other important grammatical components of the verse, one can see the options narrowed down quite significantly in order to form a proper understanding of what *saved by childbearing* could truly mean.

Σωθήσεται (“Σώζω”)

Probably the most important word to interpret in 1 Timothy 2:15 in order to have an appropriate understanding is *σωθήσεται*, from the root *σώζω* (*I save*), especially because of its implications relating to the doctrines surrounding Christian salvation. In some scenarios, “to save” could refer to deliverance from a merely physical affliction or danger, while it could also refer to the spiritual, eternal salvation of a person, or a number of related things that fall under these main two categories, as discussed above. This one word expressed in 1 Timothy 2:15 has great power in releasing the meaning of this difficult verse.

Because Paul's use of *σώζω* in his letters in the New Testament are typically in reference to that spiritual, eternal salvation by which a Christian is made right with God, this verse is difficult to interpret at face value. However, when taking into account all of the possible meanings of *σώζω* and the context of the passage of 1 Timothy 2, one can see that Paul is certainly not suggesting that a woman's spiritual salvation hinges upon her action of bearing children, as it may seem with a plain reading of the text. Obviously that interpretation would contradict every other time Paul discusses spiritual salvation, for he is clear to underline that it is *by faith alone* that one can be saved. Therefore, discovering the meaning of *σώζω* in context to this particular passage is at the heart of the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15. As already observed, there are two major distinctions in the translation of *σώζω*, each of which can be broken down into several sub-interpretations. Both the physical and spiritual renderings of the words must be examined. For the purpose of this paper, each rendering examined will be done from the viewpoint of the word's use in the New Testament in particular.

Physical Salvation. Danker offers five sub-interpretations of *σώζω* in the physical sense: (1) to "save from death," (2) to "bring out safely from a situation fraught with mortal danger," (3) to "save/free from disease," (4) to "keep, preserve in good condition," and (5) to "thrive, prosper, [or] get on well."⁷⁰ Louw and Nida advocate that this physical interpretation involves two senses, a negative one—"to rescue from danger"—and a positive one also—"to restore to a former state of safety and well-being."⁷¹ In most cases, when the New Testament uses *σώζω* in regard to physical life, it refers to "salvation from

70. BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 982.

71. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 241.

acute danger” (Acts 7:25; 27:20; Mt. 8:25; Jn. 12:27; Heb. 5:7), although there are a few instances in which it refers to healing those who are sick (Acts 4:9; 14:9; Jas. 5:15).⁷²

While this interpretation of *σώζω* is absolutely valid, when contrasted to its use in reference to spiritual deliverance, the New Testament “meaning of deliverance from immediate physical danger to life is comparatively rare.”⁷³

Spiritual Salvation. The use of *σώζω* in the spiritual or theological sense is much more common in the New Testament as opposed to the physical rendering of the word.

Vine identifies eight different ways that *σώζω* is used in the spiritual sense:

[1] of the spiritual and eternal salvation granted immediately by God to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, . . . [2] of the present experiences of God’s power to deliver from the bondage of sin, . . . [3] of the future deliverance of believers at the Second Coming of Christ for His saints, being deliverance from the wrath of God to be executed upon the ungodly at the close of this age and from eternal doom, . . . [4] of the deliverance of the nation of Israel at the Second Advent of Christ, . . . [5] inclusively for all the blessings bestowed by God on men in Christ, . . . [6] of those who endure to the end of the time of the great tribulation, . . . [7] of the individual believer, who, through losing his reward at the Judgment-Seat of Christ hereafter, will not lose his salvation, . . . [and 8] in the deliverance of the nations at the Millennium”⁷⁴

Foerster points out that, like the physical deliverance interpretations, the spiritual rendering also has both positive and negative aspects. He adds, “Salvation is salvation from judgment But positively it is endowment with divine glory that comes with the

72. Acts 7:25 records Moses’ assumption that the Israelites would realize that God sent him to rescue them from their Egyptian captivity. Acts 27:20 refers to Paul and others having no hope of being saved from a storm at sea. Mt. 8:25 documents the disciples asking Jesus to save them from a storm at sea. Jn. 12:27 quotes Jesus asking if he would be saved from his impending death. Heb. 5:7 also describes Jesus praying to God who was able to save him from his coming death. Acts 4:9 records the healing of a crippled man. Acts 14:9 also refers to the healing of a cripple. Jas. 5:15 instructs that, through prayers of faith, one who is sick can be made well.

73. Colin Brown, “*σώζω*,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1978), 211.

74. W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, edited by John R. Kohlenberger (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 993.

redemption of the body . . . and conforming to the image of the Son”⁷⁵ Indeed, salvation involves both the forgiveness of sins *and* the beginning of a new relationship with and unto God. Furthermore, another component of salvation is the process of progressive sanctification, in which one is gradually, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Christ. Clearly, the theological use of *σώζω* is quite broad.

Σώζω in 1 Timothy 2:15. Now that a survey of the range of the use of *σώζω* in biblical texts has been established, the meaning of the word in the passage of 1 Timothy 2 can begin to be unraveled. The first broad interpretation of *σώζω* as a physical understanding can be ruled out relatively quickly. A major problem with a physical understanding of *σώζω* in 1 Timothy 2:15, besides the fact that its use in this sense is rare in the New Testament in general, is the distinction of terminology for “saving” activities in specifically Pauline writings. In reference to the word group associated with *σώζω*, Foerster notes that Paul in particular “limits the group to the relationship with God; he uses *rhýomai* for rescue from other perils.”⁷⁶ That is, any danger Paul asks God for deliverance from is always termed *ῥύομαι* as opposed to *σώζω*, which is used only in relation to spiritual matters.

Because a spiritual interpretation of *σώζω* is necessary in context to New Testament and especially Pauline use of the word, another problem arises. Although *σώζω* is typically used of Paul in discussion on spiritual matters, it is clear that 1 Timothy 2:15 is a part of a passage that is not to be taken as especially relevant to his normative teachings on spiritual salvation (i.e., from sin and condemnation). The other letters by

75. Werner Foerster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, “sōzō, sōtēria,” Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 1135.

76. Foerster, *Abridged Theological Dictionary*, 1135.

Paul, and in fact the rest of the entire New Testament, are clear to express that salvation comes not by works. While Paul does, in fact, very typically use *σώζω* to describe the salvation or deliverance of a person's soul from eternal death and condemnation, this cannot be so here, for if Paul meant this in 1 Timothy 2, he would be contradicting all that he has written through the rest of Scripture that insists that salvation comes by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8). It is important to keep this in mind as this discussion unfolds; yes, the word here does have a spiritual connotation, but it is not to say that a woman's spiritual salvation from sin and rightful condemnation is contingent upon her action in childbearing. In order to keep consistency with the rest of Paul's writings on spiritual salvation, the interpretation of *σώζω* must be adjusted in accordance with the context of 1 Timothy 2.

Brown expresses that there is a unique sequence of statements about salvation in the Pastoral Epistles "which shows a comprehensive understanding of it," that is, initial salvation (justification), as well as present salvation (sanctification) and coming salvation (glorification).⁷⁷ Furthermore, while most usage of *σώζω* includes "the element of keeping from a threat," "this can disappear altogether and *σώζω* can have a purely positive content."⁷⁸ This distinction means that *σώζω* can refer not only to the negative aspects of salvation (preservation or deliverance *from* condemnation) but also can refer to the positive aspects of salvation (the results). In this way, *σώζω* can be seen also as a sort of restoration to something. On this note, O'Brien elaborates,

77. Brown, *New Testament Theology*, 214-215.

78. Werner Foerster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. XII, "Σώζω and σωτηρία in the Greek World," Edited by Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 967.

“In Paul’s letters the salvation word-group is used only in connection with humankind’s relations with God. The terms often have an eschatological orientation, so that negatively they refer to a deliverance from God’s wrath at the final judgment . . . and positively to the reinstatement of that glory of God which was lost through sin.”⁷⁹

Louw and Nida affirm that σῶζω may be translated in this way (“to restore”).⁸⁰

In the context of 1 Timothy 2, the major topic of the passage is a discussion on public worship and the roles and responsibilities of both men and women in that setting. It seems much more likely that Paul was communicating, rather than a salvific meaning for σῶζω, this idea of a restoring to an intended state, which O’Brien identifies as “that glory of God which was lost through sin.”⁸¹ This interpretation fits particularly well with the sentence preceding verse fifteen: “And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14, NASB). It is at this point that Paul writes *yet she will be saved*. That is, despite her falling into transgression, despite her being deceived and sinning, she will be saved, or restored, to that glorious state that God created her in. Having said this, and continuing with the theme of roles in this passage, Paul then turns to one particularly important role that a woman who has been restored to the glory she lost in her transgression ought to accomplish—childbearing.

Τεκνογονίας

Another extremely important word in 1 Timothy 2:15, *τεκνογονίας* (from *τεκνον*), usually translated *childbearing*, does not pose nearly as much difficulty in interpretation

79. Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 169.

80. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 242.

81. O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 169.

as *σωθήσεται*, although there are still a few issues to discuss. Interestingly, the term, having a very small semantic range, has been used quite rarely in literary history. There is only one other instance in the New Testament in which this word is found: 1 Timothy 5:14, which uses the verb form of the word, *τεκνογονεῖν*. Even in literary sources outside of the New Testament there is very little use of the word, although there are a few sources to look at that aid in the understanding of what *τεκνογονίας* conveys.⁸² The majority of all scholars agree that *τεκνογονίας* should rightly be translated *childbearing* or *the bearing of children*.⁸³ The discrepancy, however, comes in determining the range of meaning to which the word can extend—that is, whether the term strictly denotes the physical act of literally giving birth to a child or whether it allows for a more broad understanding, such as the inclusion of raising children or having a family.⁸⁴ Some scholars do limit the meaning of the word to actually bearing a child and that act alone, while many others will employ the use of a synecdoche, implying that *τεκνογονίας* can also include “the general scope of activities in which Christian women should be involved.”⁸⁵ Supporters of this interpretation commonly point to the parallel text of 1 Timothy 5:14, where Paul exhorts young women to marry, bear children, and manage their households, to show that the inclusion of this wider scope of interpretation is plausible.

82. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 140-141. See below for brief survey of literary sources.

83. BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 994.

84. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 141-142.

85. Moo, *Meaning and Significance*, 72. Supporting the use of a synecdoche are Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 140-142; Bowman, *An Exegetical Study*, 149; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 468; and Moo, *Meaning and Significance*, 73.

As far as an argument for synecdoche goes, it seems that the semantic range of *τεκνογονία* is certainly broad enough to allow for the inclusion of rearing in addition to bearing children. In fact, Vine explains that it comes from two combined words: “*teknon* and a root *gen*—, whence *gennaō*, to beget, denotes bearing children, implying the duties of motherhood”⁸⁶ Köstenberger surveys a few ancient Greek sources that include the use of *τεκνογονία*; Hippocrates’ letters and Chrysippus’ works both include uses that seem to include room for a wider interpretation and employment of synecdoche, while a reference in Aristotle limits the term to strictly a physical act.⁸⁷ Köstenberger concludes,

In the light of these observations, and particularly the reference by Chrysippus, it seems perfectly permissible to understand *τεκνογονία* in 1 Tim 2:15 as referring, not merely to the giving of birth to children, but to the having of a family, with all that this entails. The scarcity of the term accentuates the deliberateness of the usage in 1 Tim 2:1a (cf. the verb form *τεκνογονεῖν* in 1 Tim 5:14).⁸⁸

The range of *τεκνογονία* certainly appears to have the capability to extend to other related roles. This has particularly important implications in discovering the meaning of the passage of 1 Timothy 2:15, as the inclusion of a wider range of meaning opens the door for the allowance of many of the interpretations that go beyond the act of childbearing.

A notable benefit of the employment of a synecdoche for *τεκνογονία* is that it allows for the woman who is “saved by childbearing” to refer to more than just women who have physically had children or have even married. *BDAG* discusses the word *τεκνον*, including in its translation, “one who is dear to another but without genetic

86. W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1940), 188.

87. Kostenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 140-141.

88. *Ibid.*, 141.

relationship and without distinction in age,” and “of a spiritual child in relation to master, apostle, or teacher.”⁸⁹ If this meaning is employed to the compound word *τεκνογονίας*, it seems that this verse could apply to all women who have had a part in “bringing up,” others, regardless of genetic relation. Indeed, “if the reference to ‘childbearing’ should indeed be understood as a synecdoche, even unmarried women are to retain a focus on the domestic sphere and all that it entails.”⁹⁰ Titus 2:3-5 gives an example of what this sort of ministry would look like: “Older women likewise are to . . . teach what is good, and so train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (ESV). This is especially helpful to be able to include those women who never marry or have children. According to this passage, older (or more mature) women are to be leaders to the younger women, mentoring them and teaching them in the ways of the Lord. In this way, childbearing in 1 Timothy 2:15 could certainly apply to those who do not have genetic children of their own.

In Greek, the words that actually appear within the text for *τεκνογονίας* in 1 Timothy 2:15 are actually τῆς *τεκνογονίας*, or, *the childbearing*. It is for this reason, namely, that the Messianic interpretation exists. Despite the inclusion of the definite article, however, most interpreters deem its use to be generic, as this seems to be more appropriate to the course of Paul’s argument.⁹¹ While it is attractive, certainly, to try to point this idea toward the birth of Christ, this simply cannot be accepted. As observed in

89. *BDAG, Greek-English Lexicon*, 994.

90. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 143.

91. Bowman, *Exegetical Study*, 210.

the Messianic interpretation section, a reference to Christ's birth in this passage would be extremely random and irregular, not fitting the context at all. Thus, a generic understanding of the definite article should be taken. *Τεκνογονίας* should be understood as a general reference to the broad concept of childbearing in its entirety, likely with the additional use of a synecdoche to include also the bringing up of children.

Δι

Now the study must turn to the word that connects the previously two discussed in the phrase "saved *by* childbearing." The significance of this word, not surprisingly, is also an issue of dispute. *BDAG* discusses a whole survey of possible meanings of δι, including "marker of extension through an area or object," "marker of extension in time," "marker of instrumentality or circumstance whereby someth. is accomplished or effected," "marker of pers. agency," "marker of an extension through an area," "marker of someth. constituting cause," and many variations of the above.⁹² Commentators of 1 Timothy 2:15 employ a variety of translations, and because the range of interpretation is so wide, only the more accepted versions will be discussed here. Probably the four most notable interpretations of δι in this passage specifically are (1) *even though* (despite), (2) *during* (temporal), (3) *in the experience of* (attendant circumstance), (4) *by means of* (instrumental). Many commentators quickly discard the first two options as non-viable, for option (1) is an unnatural translation of the word both contextually and grammatically, and option (2) would employ a natural or physical meaning to σῶζω, which cannot be so here, as observed earlier. There are certainly scholars who hold to

92. *BDAG, Greek-English Lexicon*, 223-226.

either of these two meanings, but neither of them is likely when compared to the other options. The third and fourth, however, are not so easy to decide between.

One side of the argument says that $\delta\iota\kappa$ should be translated *by means of*. After stating the misinterpretation of $\delta\iota\kappa$ in the hindrance view's translation (option 1 above), Schreiner continues,

Neither is it persuasive to see $\delta\iota\kappa$ as referring to attendant circumstances, so that women will be saved 'in the experience' of childbirth. This interpretation is dictated by theology rather than syntax. Probably the common instrumental sense of $\delta\iota\kappa$ is intended here.⁹³

However, the other side of the argument, which translates $\delta\iota\kappa$ as referring to attendant circumstances, makes a good point likewise. Marshall explains,

However, it is unlikely that the $\delta\iota\kappa$ phrase should be pressed to express instrumentality; it expresses circumstances rather than instrument. The point is probably directed against a belief that women should abstain from childbirth, just as they abstain from marriage Though they do not teach, women will still be saved by fulfilling their Christian duty in motherhood.⁹⁴

Marshall asserts that it is for this reason—the use of $\delta\iota\kappa$ —that this verse does *not* imply salvation by works; the circumstantial, rather than instrumental, use of the word allows this to be so. While Schreiner believes that this interpretation is more theological than syntactical, Bowman argues that that interpretation of “attendant circumstances seems preferable, given the contextual stress on the process of sanctification. More specifically, ‘childbearing’ is one of the good works that is to be part of the lifestyle of a godly woman (cf. v. 10).”⁹⁵ Both the attendant circumstance and the instrumentality options have fairly solid arguments, and therefore deciding between the two is difficult.

93. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 117.

94. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 470.

95. Bowman, *Exegetical Study*, 210.

“If They Remain in Faith, Love, and Holiness”

Although the previous pages of this paper have focused majorly on the three words “saved through childbearing,” the following section will address the remainder of the verse which reads, “if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (ESV). The first issue to deal with in this latter part of 1 Timothy 2:15 is to determine to whom this conditional clause applies. There is an awkward transition that occurs within the verse, as it begins addressing “she” (. . . will be saved by childbearing), and then switches to “they” (. . . if they continue). This shift in number from singular to plural subjects has warranted several proposed solutions. Three are noteworthy. Before determining the intended subject of “they,” it should be acknowledged that “she,” in agreement with almost every commentator, is generally accepted to refer Eve specifically (in light of her mention in verse 14), but also to extend to all women who are believers in general (though directly to the saved women in Ephesus).

The first of the three explanations for the transition to the plural is that “they” includes the women being discussed, as well as their husbands also. This understanding is probably the least likely, as the contextual thought development does not warrant much support for it. Either of the other two options is more commonly accepted.

The second explanation for the shift to the plural is that “they” refers to the children that are the product of the woman’s childbearing. Thus, “She will be saved by childbearing if they (her children) continue” The problem that comes about with this explanation is the difficulty of explaining away just how contingent the woman’s being saved is upon the faithfulness of her children. Even with a view of $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ that is understood as more of a positive restoration to an intended state with important roles to

fulfill than salvation from eternal condemnation, why would her child's faithfulness be the determining factor? Quinn and Wacker, discussing the interpretation that "they" refers to the woman's children, claim, "The virtues listed are those which *children* have learned from their mother and in which they persevere, thus witnessing to the power and authenticity of the formation that they have received."⁹⁶ Still, some sort of spiritual salvation is at stake here, and certainly not all children do ultimately continue on in faith, even with a respectable, faithful upbringing by parents of authentic belief in Christ. This interpretation inevitably implies that, in some way, the perseverance of faith in children falls back to parental responsibility. Should a child who does not continue in the faith be credited as a failure of the parent? This surely cannot be. Determining the subject in this addition of a conditional clause here has extremely important implications, and making a woman's eligibility for whatever it may be that this verse is communicating to be dependent on her children is risky.

For a third explanation, Schreiner argues,

The third singular at the beginning of the sentence refers to women generically, and thus Paul shifts to "women" plural in the latter half of the verse. This fits with the structure of the passage as a whole, where Paul begins by speaking of women in the plural (vv. 9-10), shifts to the singular (vv. 11-15a), and then reverts to the plural.⁹⁷

While the structure and shifting back and forth of plurality of subjects is awkward here, Porter observes that it is "no more awkward than to suggest . . . that the children are the subject."⁹⁸ In favor of this, Köstenberger reports, ". . . it should be noted that the shift

96. Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 233.

97. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 117.

98. Porter, *What Does it Mean?*, 98.

from a singular to a plural subject from the first to the second half of the verse is a sign of incongruence characteristic of paraenetic style, and that there is therefore no reason to interpret this shift as connoting a change of subject.”⁹⁹ Falconer agrees that this interpretation is proper, and argues that because bearing children (and motherhood in general) is not a strictly Christian ability, Paul inserts the conditional clause to clarify that those who will be “saved by childbearing” are those women who are already Christians.¹⁰⁰ Fee agrees, stating, “But Paul could never leave the matter there, as though salvation itself were attained by this ‘good deed,’ so he immediately qualifies, ‘Provided of course that she is already a truly Christian woman,’ that is, a woman who **continues in faith, love, and holiness**” (emphasis original).¹⁰¹ With additional support for the third view, Marshall explains also that the plural subject “seems quite inappropriate as a reference to children since they are surely to be brought to faith rather than continue in it.”¹⁰²

As Quinn and Wacker confirm, “The shift from singular subject and verb to a plural . . . is as harsh in Greek as in English.”¹⁰³ Either way that one understands this odd wording is unavoidably unsettling. Whether the singular to plural shift in wording is a reference to children or to women, there are issues that arise. To take “they” as referring to children seems to place unreasonable requirements upon women, while taking it as a reference to the women themselves is grammatically strange. It seems that the less

99. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles*, 117.

100. Falconer, *Interpretative Notes*, 377.

101. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 76.

102. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 471.

103. Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 233.

problematic solution would be to take the plural subject to be the women themselves, despite the grammatical issue. Thus, the conditional clause that appears in 1 Timothy 2:15 should most likely be understood as an additional comment to the women Paul is addressing to affirm their standing as genuine believers in Christ who, based on their faith, are living as they ought with lives characterized by faith, love, and holiness with self control.

Conclusions

Clearly, the attempted interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 has produced a great deal of work among scholars and Bible readers alike to come to an understanding of what this difficult text implies. The grammatical considerations, as well as the very words themselves, make interpreting this text a challenge. However, based on all that has been discussed, a few conclusions may be suggested. The two interpretations surveyed that seem to be the most compelling, making the most sense of 1 Timothy 2:15's intriguing statement, are the perseverance and attendant circumstances interpretations. Each of these proposals seems to fit in well with the theology disclosed within the Pastoral Epistles, as well as the more specific context of the verse. Historical and lexical factors are also in support of each of these explanations. There are, however, negative factors to each as well. The attendant circumstances view seems to place too much emphasis on childbearing, elevating the role almost excessively (as Falconer says, "almost sacramental"), while the eschatological view's emphasis on the future sense of *σώζω* does not seem to be particularly fitting to the context. It is likely that the proper way to understand 1 Timothy 2:15 is closely linked to these two interpretations. It seems that 1 Timothy 2:15 seems to exist to promote and affirm the significance of the ministry of

childbearing and rearing as one of women's important roles that Paul has specifically chosen to highlight.

As for the translation of *σωθήσεται*, based upon the research presented in this paper regarding its translation in 1 Timothy 2:15, it seems most fitting that it should be understood as O'Brien defines: negatively to deliverance from eternal condemnation, and, especially, "positively to the reinstatement of that glory of God which was lost through sin."¹⁰⁴ While the translation of *δι*□ remains difficult, on the basis of the findings of this study, it is preferable to translate it to describe the attendant circumstances surrounding childbearing. Otherwise, too much weight is placed on childbearing as somehow being a determinant of women's salvation. *Τεκνογονίας* clearly refers to childbearing, and though debatable, a synecdoche can likely be applied safely to extend its meaning to a variety of activities in the domestic sphere. The conditional clause, because implying that women's salvation is somehow dependent on anything other than faith produces troubling implications, is more safely understood as applying to the women themselves as a clarification of their status as believers who, as a result of their already established faith in Christ, continue to live in faith, love, and holiness with self-control.

What, then, is the intended meaning of 1 Timothy 2:15? Schreiner, addressing in particular women who do not have children of their own, puts it well:

[Paul] selects childbearing because it is the most notable example of the divinely intended difference in role between men and women, and many women throughout history have had children. Thus, Paul generalizes from the experience of women in using a representative example of women maintaining their proper role. To select childbearing is another indication that the argument is transcultural, for childbearing is not limited to a particular culture but is a

104. O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 169.

permanent and ongoing difference between men and women. The fact that God has ordained that women and only women bear children indicates that the differences in roles between men and women are rooted in the created order.¹⁰⁵

It may seem to some reading this passage in 1 Timothy that women are being relegated to be of no value (especially after reading vv. 11-13), but this is indeed the opposite of Paul's intention. Instead, he is showing that God is restoring them and commending to them the enormous significance of their ministry. By highlighting this important role, Paul emphasizes the ministry of childbearing and motherhood, and possibly even further, the ministry that Christian women have to others beyond their very own offspring. Childbearing is surely not the only significant ministry opportunity afforded to women, but it is one of particular prestige and relevance to the passage at hand and its discussion on roles in the church. Discussing this text in conjunction with Galatians 3:28, Köstenberger explains,

. . . there is no warrant for taking Gal 3:28 to be normative while consigning 1 Tim 2:15 to the state of historical and cultural relativity. Contrary to such efforts, the teachings of Gal 3:28 and 1 Tim 2:15 should rather both be considered as normative teachings and be related to one another in the sense that Scripture teaches *both* that women and men have equal status as believers in Christ *and* that they have different roles assigned to them by their Creator.¹⁰⁶

Despite the fact that the role of women in the church does not lie in teaching or being in authority over men, and despite the fact that Eve was deceived and fell into sin, yet she (women) will be restored to “that glory of God which was lost through sin,”¹⁰⁷ as she, a genuine believer, participates in the role and ministry of childbearing, as well as other godly roles that fit within the order of God's creation.

105. Schreiner, *An Interpretation*, 118.

106. Köstenberger, *Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles*, 144.

107. O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 169.

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